The Web of Stories in Che Work of Leslie Marmon Silko.

Kristy S. Long

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The Web of Stories in the Work of
Leslie Marmon Silko

by
Kristy S. Long

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Chairman of Department
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The mythic figure Spider Woman, the symbolic creator of Leslie Marmon Silko's novel, *Ceremony*, is a representative figure for the web motif in Silko's work. Silko's writing reveals that a web of stories links individuals to their American Indian heritage in some very special ways.

Silko's written fiction and poetry illustrate that the concept of "story" is as important now as it was in the earlier days of oral storytelling. Her work shows that stories serve at least three primary but overlapping functions. First, stories help their tellers establish a sense of personal identity. As storytellers recall people and events of their own and their culture's past, they gain a sense of their own importance as bearers of memories and traditions.

Second, stories have a mythic function. They relate how things were in "time immemorial" and offer individuals comfort by showing them that events in their own lives have parallels in situations found in traditional stories. Finally, Silko's own fiction and poetic narrative show that stories have a religious function by showing man's connection to nature and to the land, to ceremony and to ritual. They also offer a contrast 1
between the Indian's wholistic lifestyle and the white man's religion of printed words and isolated rituals. In the face of this contrast, traditional stories provide Indians with an alternative to succumbing to white acculturation. All three functions of stories, however, are joined by a common thread, for they share the goal of linking individual Indians to the rest of society by keeping alive shared traditional goals, behavior and cultural values.
Introduction: Spider Woman and Storytelling

Thought-Woman, the spider named things and as she named them they appeared.

-- Ceremony

Spider Woman, or Spider Grandmother, holds a prominent place in Indian legend. In Pueblo myth, she is the creation of Sótunknang, who was created by the "Creator," Taiowa, the sun. Religious myth tells us that she was created to be Sótunknang's helper on earth.\(^1\) Frank Waters, in *Book of the Hopi*, informs us that Spider Woman formed all men--red, yellow, black, and white--out of the earth.\(^2\) After creating mankind, Spider Woman led the people as they progressed through the three early worlds to the Fourth World. As the people stopped in each world, Spider woman gave them advice and taught them skills to improve their lives.


\(^2\)Waters, p. 6.
She reappears throughout legend as a wise advisor and helper of the Indian people. She also has the honor of being the grandmother of the sacred War Twins, Ma'see'wi and Ou'yu'ye'wi (Laguna Pueblo), who were conceived by mortal woman and the Sun (or some otherworldly being) and who are the saviors of the People. Even to these powerful twins she acts as advisor, and she helps them develop the courage and wisdom which make them so significant to their people. Thus, Spider Woman's important place in Indian myth connects her to the earth mother, grandmother of the people, and creatress of life.

Spider Woman is usually depicted as an old woman, hence, the correlating name, Spider Grandmother. Legend tells us that she was created as young and fair, but, later, when she exercised poor judgement and tried to lead the people to the Fourth World before they were prepared to enter it, Sótunknang punished her by allowing her to grow old and ugly.

Despite the termination of her beauty, Spider Woman's power and reason remain untarnished. She

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continues to guide and advise her people in times of trouble. In fact, her age may even enhance her validity as advisor because of the additional respect traditionally granted to older members of a tribe.

In her poetry, Leslie Silko repeatedly emphasizes Spider Woman's wisdom and her place in the legends as she tells how "Old Spider Woman . . . always helped the people whenever they faced great difficulties." In two of Silko's poems, Spider Woman protects Estoy-eh-muut, Arrowboy, from his wife, Kochininako, who has joined the evil Kunideeyah Clan or the Buffalo Clan, and she then advises him on how to destroy her. One poem even tells how Spider Grandmother becomes advisor to the Sun, whose children are held captive by a Ck'o'yo magician.

Although Spider Woman is important as an advisor to her people, she also is clearly linked to storytelling. When she formed man from the earth, Spider Woman sang over him the "Song of Creation," which is,

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perhaps, the first story, for it outlines the Creator's plan of life. \(^8\)

Silko emphasizes Spider Woman's relationship to storytelling by making her the creatress of the story in her novel *Ceremony*. Ts'its'tsi'nako, Thought-Woman, Spider Woman--Silko keeps them as a single personae and explains that this figure "created the Universe and the four worlds below." \(^9\) The Spider Woman of her novel spins the strands of her narrative through Silko just as the Spider Woman of legend spins advice to her people. In fact, a story, like Spider Woman's advice, has curative power. Stories, she says, "aren't just entertainment. ... They are all we have, you see, ... to fight off illness and death" (p. 2). In *Ceremony*, the stories and the rituals and the ceremony connected with them save the protagonist, Tayo, from evil and death.

Spider Woman and her story in *Ceremony* demonstrate how stories operate on several levels in Silko's work. Stories, like the filaments of a web, extend in many directions, for there are many different kinds of stories. However, all stories have a central purpose

\(^8\)Waters, p. 7.

in making the individual their hub or center and in linking him to his community and culture. During an interview in 1979, Silko commented that stories enable the individual to begin to see things not just as me, alone kind of way [sic], but to begin to see one's experiences, one's fate, one's tragedies in terms of something . . . that . . . brings everyone closer, and it makes you seem much more like a part of the stories. . . . In other words, this telling is a kind of identity for you.10

Chapter 1: The Celebration of the Individual in Storytelling

The Laguna people always begin their stories with "humma-hah": that means "long ago." And the ones who are listening say "aaaa-eh."

- "The Laguna People"

Until this century brought white schools into Indian territory, few Indians could read or write. In fact, we have no evidence of written vocabulary for any tribes before 1821, when Sequoyah invented a syllabary for the Cherokees. Consequently, the rich store of history, myth, and legend was passed orally from generation to generation. Pictures, preserved on canvas or stone walls, could capture an instant in time, perhaps a famous battle or part of a ceremony. However, the

\[1\] In American Indian Fiction (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1978), Charles Larson explains the importance of a winter count—a drawing on canvas—to a tribe. The winter count served as a sort of calendar for a tribe, for it recorded the most important event of the year—a battle, a successful hunt, etc. In fact, a winter count, like a photograph, is part of a story, but only a part. The complete story, that now can be preserved in written form, is more important than the winter count, for it fills in all details of an event. As Silko explains about the photographs that she includes in Storyteller: "The photographs are here because they are part of the many stories and because many of the stories can be traced in the photographs." (p. 1)
complete story behind the picture, the lesson, the history, or the legend, could only be preserved through memory and transmitted through storytelling.

Silko's writing reveals that storytelling can make people feel important as they tell of events that happened to them and to their families. Stories, thus, help people to share a part of themselves and to create a special sense of identity. In stories, people can preserve individual memories of family and friends and can also recall significant communal events that shaped and defined a whole people. These same stories preserve a past rich with traditions and customs, some of which, with the intrusion of the modern, outside world, no longer exist except in stories. Stories are also a way of spreading local gossip. To a culture rich in oral tradition, gossip is neither "idle" nor tale telling, but is a shared knowledge of an event or person.

Silko believes that storytelling establishes a personal identity for the storyteller. People's stories are a part of their families' and their own pasts and a part of their continuing individual experiences. A story is personal, and it is unique; regardless of how many people tell the same story, each person's version will be special and will tell something about the teller as well as about the event or action of the story.
Silko has said that "what I know is Laguna. This place I am from is everything I am as a writer and human being."\(^2\) Importantly, numerous stories in her collection, *Storyteller*, are simple recollections about her family and friends, but these simple stories are filled with warm and loving details drawn from memory and from the memories of those who recounted these stories to her. Silko recalls Great-grandpa Stagner and his Mexican wife, Grandma Helen, who spoke English but would only speak Spanish to little Leslie. Silko remembers Grandma Helen "dressed in black, rolling her own cigarettes in brown wheat papers."\(^3\) Silko lovingly recalls old Juana, the Navajo woman who raised Grandma Helen's children and was more of a mother to them than was Grandma Helen. Silko also remembers that "[My] Grandma Lillie and I always took flowers/ to Juana's grave in the old graveyard behind the village." In the graveyard "markers . . . are small flat sandstones/ and many of them have been broken." Grandma Lillie "was never quite sure if we had found her grave/ but we left the jar of


\(^3\)"Grandpa Stagner had a wagon," *Storyteller*, p. 88.
roses and lilacs we had cut anyway."\(^4\) The effect of these recollections is that through stories we can re-capture the homey, gossipy subjects and tone of the oral tradition on paper.

The oral tradition also allows people to recount customs and traditions, which have been replaced, even in Indian culture, by modern technology and achievements. In one of her poems about Grandma A'mooh, Silko describes her grandmother's living the old, traditional way. Grandma A'mooh "still washed her hair with yucca roots or 'soap weed' as she called it . . . [for] it kept white hair like hers from yellowing."\(^5\) Her grandmother made chili the old way, by getting down on her knees and using the grinding stone. Further, Grandma A'mooh used neither toothpaste nor cornflakes; rather, she abided by tradition and cleaned her teeth with juniper ash and ate crushed "maaht'zini" with milk.

Storytelling, however, is more than recollection, more than detail, more than object or event recalled. Each story, whether its subject is old or new, is re-created by the individual teller and perfected in the

\(^4\)"Grandpa Stagner had a wagon," *Storyteller*, p. 88.

\(^5\)"It was a long time before," *Storyteller*, p. 34.
telling. Silko shows this distinguishing quality of the oral tradition by telling about her Aunt Susie, who "had certain phrases, certain distinctive words" that she used to tell her stories. She also describes her Grandma A'mooh, who could read the same story over and over again to her grandchildren, and they would still listen because "she always read the story with such animation and expression/ changing her tone of voice and inflection . . . the way a storyteller would have told it." Storytelling is an art that demands that the teller be involved in a subject and the words chosen to describe that subject. Tayo, Silko's protagonist in Ceremony, describes that involvement when he explains the way the tribal medicine man speaks:

The word he chose . . . was filled with the intricacies of a continuing process, and with a strength inherent in spider webs woven across paths through sand hills. . . . It took a long time to explain the fragility and intricacy because no word exists alone, and the reason for choosing each word had to be explained with a story about why it must be said this certain way. . . . The story behind each word


must be told so there could be no mistake in the meaning of what had been said; and this demanded great patience and love. (pp.36-37)

Not only are stories important, but so also are storytellers, the special people who are remembered for their art. Many of Silko's memories about Grandma A'mooh stem from her storytelling. Further, Silko remembers her well-educated Aunt Susie as someone who "took time from her studies and writing to answer my questions and to tell me all that she knew on a subject." Silko lovingly recalls her as one "who has cherished the Laguna stories all her life" and who leaves a legacy of "stories and remembered accounts." The power and the personal identity created by one's story is the essence of Silko's "Storyteller," which looks at the life of a young Eskimo woman. As the young woman sits in prison, waiting to be tried for the murder of a white man, she recalls the "story" of her life. Her most important influence was an old man that she knows as grandfather, who repeatedly tells a story, the same story about a hunter on the ice and a

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8"I always called her Aunt Susie," Storyteller, p. 4.

9"I always called her Aunt Susie," Storyteller, pp. 7, 6.
giant bear. She remembers that even while the old man slept, "his lips quivered and sometimes they moved like he was telling a story, even while he dreamed." The young woman recalls with pride the first time she brought home a story to the old man. The story is of how she slept with a Gussock, a white man, who hung a picture of a woman and a German shepherd fornicating over the bed as they made love. The strangeness of the Gussocks gives her something to laugh about and share with the old man. In fact, this story is the beginning of the whole story of her interaction with the Gussocks, their misunderstanding of Eskimo ways, and their lust for Eskimo women. When the Gussock storekeeper wants to sleep with her and chases her out onto the ice, falls through, and drowns, the young woman believes that she willed his death and that his death is part of her story that she cannot change. Just as the grandfather dies telling his same story about the hunter on the ice and the blue glacier bear, the young woman ends her story in jail, refusing to "change the story, not even to escape this place and go home. I intended that [the Gussock]  

die. The story must be told as it is.\textsuperscript{11} To the young woman, the story is powerful. It draws its power from her will, and, in turn, the story helps her to define herself. To change her story would be to lie about her identity.

Another of Silko's short stories, "Tony's Story," conveys a similar theme. Although storytelling is not its subject, having a story which strengthens one's identity is its essence. The plot is about Tony and his friend Leon and their series of encounters with a white policeman who obviously hates Indians. To Tony, the policeman assumes a greater significance than a bigoted cop; rather, he is a witch and is symbolic of the evil that is alive in the world. The events of the story--the series of chases and encounters between the policeman and the two Indians--are given to us through Tony's consciousness. Tony even envisions that the cop's billy club turns to a "human bone painted brown to look like wood."\textsuperscript{12} The events as Tony perceives them, and this is his story, are certainly tainted by witchcraft that he feels he must destroy. Leon thinks

\textsuperscript{11} "Storyteller," \textit{Storyteller}, p. 31.

\textsuperscript{12} "Tony's Story," \textit{The Man to Send Rain Clouds}, p. 74.
that Tony is crazy—that the cop just hates Indians—but Tony knows better. While Leon speaks of the rights that he and Tony have—to drive on the highways and go to San Lorenzo's Day Fair—Tony thinks that "Leon didn't seem to understand; he couldn't remember the stories that old Teofilo told." Tony believes it is imperative that they kill the policeman and burn the body. Thus, when the policeman stops them, after chasing them down a deserted highway, Tony shoots him, burns him by exploding his car, and feels relieved about the murder. The cool army vet Leon trembles as Tony takes control. As the story ends, however, Tony's efforts are about to be rewarded, for the rain clouds are gathering in the sky, promising to rejuvenate the drought-ridden land. Hence, Tony has created an identity for himself—destroyer of evil and witchcraft. "Tony's Story" exists as a tribute to his achievement and as a reminder of the role that he played.

Not only do storytellers live stories with their own lives, but they also carry on an ancient custom as bearers of traditional tales of myth and real people. In "The Storyteller's Escape," Silko explains that

13"Tony's Story," The Man to Send Rain Clouds, p. 74.
The old teller has been on every journey
and she knows all the escape stories
even stories bold before she was
born.
She keeps the stories for those who return
but more important
for the dear ones who do not come
back
so that we may remember them
and cry for them with the stories. 14

Silko's Storyteller collection is, in part, just such a
collection of old myths about Coyote trickster, the
Ck'o'yo magician, and Spider Grandmother; of memories
of family and friends; and of local gossip. As she
tells these tales, the stories take on a new dimension.
They become her version of what occurred, her version of
"time immemorial." Hence, we get a circular effect;
Silko defines herself through her role as storyteller,
and her stories acquire her own special touch. No other
teller can relate these stories in quite the same way.

Ultimately, individualizing a universal or local
tale is what storytelling is all about. For example,
Silko tells a story about a rooster she once had as a
pet. This story, in turn, reminds her of a story about
Grandma Lillie and an ornery rooster that belonged to
Great-grandpa Marmon. Silko remembers that she had
recalled Grandma Lillie's story to her, about the time

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that she swung a milkbucket at the mean rooster and knocked him out. But Grandma Lillie had corrected her and explained that the rooster was dead, not stunned. Same story, different teller. As Silko explains:

I've heard tellers begin 'The way I heard it was . . .' and then proceed with another story purportedly a version of a story just told but the story they would tell was a wholly separate story, a new story with an integrity of its own, an offspring, a part of the continuing which storytelling must be.15

This same process of variation from teller to teller occurs even with traditional myth, as, for example, in the coyote stories. Silko has a poem called "Toe'osh: Laguna Coyote," which is based on a traditional Laguna myth. Commenting on Silko's poem, her friend Nora told her that her own grandfather told the same story, but that his version was much longer. Of course, there are many different kinds of Coyote stories, several versions of which Silko relates in Storyteller. Yet, storytellers may take certain liberties with their versions of traditional tales because they must express their own feeling and insights about characterizations and developments. Silko explains one way of dealing

15"I just fed a rooster a blackened banana (from a letter)," Storyteller, p. 227.
with a traditional story such as a Coyote tale: "You can strip it down to sort of the bare details and the way that piece is structured, the rest of the episodes of Coyote give you the kind of background that you need to have for Coyote."\(^{16}\) For an illustration of Silko's meaning we can look at her story "Coyote Holds A Full House." In this story Coyote is a human being, but the human coyote is as wily as his legendary counterpart, for the sexually frustrated man tricks the women in Winslow, Arizona, into believing that he is a medicine man and that in order to heal an ailing woman, he must make a ceremony in which he caresses the thighs of all the sick lady's clanswomen. The trickster theme of the tale remains the same as in traditional stories; however, a non-Indian or modern audience may more easily relate to the present day setting and human relationships in the tale.

Just as carefully as a teller spins his or her own version of a traditional tale, a storyteller will also recount an individualized version of local gossip. In the past, gossip was the only way of recounting important events to a community that had no newspapers or television. The excitement for a teller comes from knowing about the event that has touched his life, if only

in a small way. Silko conveys the meaning that local gossip has for storyteller and audience:

If you listen closely when someone is talking about something that happened two weekends ago at Paguate after a dance, very quickly, other stories that occurred in other places or incidents that occurred in that same place [are brought to mind]. . . . In other words, whenever a place or a family or a kind of activity, whenever some things like that is related [sic], at the same time, all other kinds of stories are remembered or told. . . . You can begin to laugh at things that happened.17

A local incident can be as simple as relating how one Laguna man on his way to the outhouse, found another respectable Laguna man and a Laguna housewife making love in an old barn in the middle of winter. This is the subject of Silko's "Laughing and Laughing About Something that Happened at Mesita." There is no moral in her story, only laughter and shared information about how the first man was so shocked that he forgot to go to the toilet.

On the other hand, recounting a local incident may mean telling about something that happened many years ago. One story that Silko recalls concerns Franz Boas, the ethnologist and linguist, who came through Laguna in 1918 with his assistant Elsie Clews Parsons to study Pueblo culture. Although in 1918 this incident was merely subject for local gossip, the incident is now

part of Laguna history, for both Boas and Parsons have written several texts on Indian culture. Boas' *Keresan Texts* is especially important, for it is the best collection of Pueblo myths and their variants. Silko's pride in her account of Boas' visit is also personal, for her great-grandfather Marmon told Boas a coyote story that he included in his text. Part of the excitement for the teller who details these local incidents both past and present is the sense of history or history-in-the-making of which he or she is a part.

In essence, then, storytelling in Silko's work is a constant discovery and rediscovery of self. Storytelling is both art and necessity for her. Whether she merely recounts something as simple as the way Grandma A'mooh read stories to her or establishes the self-identifying process of storytelling in "Storyteller," Silko emphasizes the importance of the individual teller. Her work consistently affirms her belief in storytelling as a living process, dependent upon the individuality of storytellers for its continued growth.

Consequently, Silko's celebration of the teller is but one type of spider's web that storytelling generates. The individual teller, just like Spider Woman, the creatress of *Ceremony*, spins tales. Some of them were told many times before and others are new stories,
created from everyday occurrences. However, both types of stories will continue to be told in new and different ways by other tellers. The variety of stories and tellers and their constant changing keep the web of storytelling ever growing, never stale.
Chapter 2: The Importance of Myth in Storytelling

You should understand
the way it was
back then,
because it is the same even now.
--"Storytelling"

Sharing importance with the celebration of the individual in the web of storytelling is the continuation of myth. Even as traditional Greek myth celebrates and immortalizes human beings such as Oedipus, Antigone, Odysseus, and Iphigenia for their feats and their interactions with powerful gods and goddesses such as Zeus, Venus, and Hermes, so also does Laguna/Pueblo myth exhalt and record such human figures as Arrow Youth, Yellow Woman and her sisters, Red Woman, Blue Woman, and White Woman, for their adventures with supernatural figures such as Spider Woman, Taiowa (the creator), and various kachinas and otherworldly beings. Because of their mystery and their unusual abilities, creatures or beings with powers beyond those which mortals possess will always fascinate people. However, one of the major reasons why any people tell and retell traditional myths is that ordinary people, just like themselves, find themselves in such strange situations.
Myths from the oral traditions allow people to identify their behavior with that of people from the past. Storytelling allows a person to see that what he or she is doing now is not so very different from something that has been done by a character immortalized in myth. Silko uses many traditional mythic frameworks such as the abduction story, the trickster story, and the savior story. With these genres, she is able to show the similarity of the mythic past to the present.

One of Silko's favorite myths is the Yellow Woman abduction story. The traditional versions of this story contain various similar elements. The main character is Yellow Woman, who is married to or the sister of Arrow Youth or Shock of Hair Youth. While getting water at the river, Yellow Woman is abducted by a kachina with supernatural powers; he may be Cliff Dweller, Flint Wing, Whirlwind Man, or Buffalo Man. Yellow Woman is taken to the mountain home of this abductor and made to perform impossible tasks at the risk of her life. She is often aided by Spider Woman and, then, either returns safely to her home or is killed while escaping. In most versions, Yellow Woman is pregnant by the kachina at the time of her escape,
and after being killed, gives miraculous birth to the hero twins.¹

In her short story "Yellow Woman," Silko uses the traditional abduction story framework to create her own account "of a modern Pueblo woman's temporary escape from the reality of the present into the myth of the past."² The main character is both a modern young woman who has run away with her lover, Silva ("Silva" is Spanish for miscellany or anthology), and a young woman of legend, who is spirited away by a kachina from the north.³ Through this young woman's confusion about her identity, Silko emphasizes the legendary quality of personal experience.

Silko relates only a brief summary of a typical Yellow Woman story: "Yellow Woman went away with the spirit from the north and lived with him and his


³Silva possesses traits of various mythic Yellow Woman abductors. See Boas, Keresan Texts, and Ruoff, "The Queres (Keres) Sources" for Silva's specific characteristics that parallel those of the legendary kachinas.
relatives. She was gone for a long time, but then one
day she came back and she brought twin boys.\textsuperscript{4} Both
Silva and the young woman allude to the legend in
their conversations--Silva, by refusing to speak of
their identities apart from the myth, and the woman,
by denying that she is reliving it. Unlike the woman,
Silva has no doubt of their legendary identities and
insists that she knows who he really is. On the other
hand, the Pueblo woman tells Silva that she does not
have to go with him as Yellow Woman had to go with the
kachina; yet, soon afterward, she acknowledges that
he is strong enough to hurt or kill her. If Silko's
point were merely to emphasize the couple's reliving
the myth, the reader would wonder why she does not
include more specific details about it and its paral-
lels to her story.

Silko, however, omits several details of the ori-
ginal Yellow Woman story in her version: Yellow Wo-
man's forced abduction, the various difficult tasks
that Yellow Woman must perform, the help she receives
from Spider Woman, and miraculous birth at the myth's

\textsuperscript{4}Leslie Marmon Silko, "Yellow Woman," in The Man
to Send Rainclouds: Contemporary Stories by American
Indians, ed. Kenneth Rosen (New York: Viking Press,
1974), p. 35. All further references to the story will
be noted parenthetically in the text.
end. The key to Silko's motivation for eliminating certain parts of the original may lie in another change that she makes in her brief account of the Yellow Woman myth. The young Pueblo woman recalls that "Yellow Woman went away with the spirit from the north" (p. 35). This parallels the woman's admission about going to the mountains with Silva, for she explains that "I did not decide to go. I just went" (p. 41). Unlike traditional renditions of the abducted Yellow Woman, Silko's version leaves the impression of the woman's nonresistance to the spirit/Silva. Such a modification emphasizes the possibility of the Pueblo woman's actually wanting to escape family and home and the Yellow Woman myth's being a convenient and romantic escape for her behavior.

Silko emphasizes the Pueblo woman's ambiguous feelings about her present situation--her tenderness for Silva and her guilt about deserting her family. She starts to leave Silva several times, but each time she returns. She even attempts a dangerous journey with him to Marques to sell the meat he has stolen while rustling cattle. She tries to appease her conscience by thinking that her husband can find another woman, and her mother can raise the children. Her internal dilemma continues even when she is finally on
her way back to her family, for she still thinks about the mountains and Silva, comforting herself by hoping that "he will come back sometime and be waiting again by the river" (p. 45).

Yet, the reality of her situation--her desertion of her family and her guilt--are balanced by her fascination with the mythic situation in which she finds herself. In fact, the woman often feels herself caught up in Silva's Yellow Woman story. Ironically, she never gives the real name she so adamantly insists that she has. The only name by which she is called in the story is "Yellow Woman," for Silva insists on it. Further, as she and Silva begin their journey up the mountain to Silva's home, she hopes to meet someone, "some man from nearby--and I will be sure that I am not Yellow Woman. Because she is from out of time past and . . . those stories couldn't happen now" (pp. 36-37). Indeed, Silva continually emphasizes myth as when he tells her that the Yellow Woman stories live on through the generations, are repeated over and over again, and that someday other people will tell their story and say, "Those two lived long ago when things like that happened" (p. 37). The young woman finally finds some comfort in thinking that her grandfather, who is dead, would have offered a Yellow Woman story to
the rest of the family as an explanation of her absence. Her grandfather had understood the fusion of myth and reality in many modern experiences. The Pueblo woman believes, "if old Grandpa weren't dead he would tell them what happened--he would laugh and say, 'Stolen by a ka'tsina, a mountain spirit. She'll come home--they usually do" (p. 41).

The ambiguity of the story is further reinforced by Silko's incorporating an animal trickster myth or legend into her Yellow Woman story. This legend concerns Coyote and Badger, who, while out hunting, find Yellow Woman and desire to sleep with her. Coyote wants her to himself so he tricks Badger into a hole and shuts him up in it. Thus, he has the woman to himself all night. Interestingly, the young Pueblo woman's recalling this myth is interrupted by an order from Silva:

Coyote wanted to be with her all night so he sent Badger into a prairie-dog hole, telling him he thought he saw something in it. As soon as Badger crawled in, Coyote blocked up the entrance with rocks and hurried back to Yellow Woman.

"Come here," he said gently. (p. 35)

Without the dialogue guides indicating that Silva is speaking, and without the story's shifting back to the interaction between Silva and the Pueblo woman, the line could easily be attributed to Coyote. Of course, Silva has just slept with the young Pueblo woman, and he has,
by taking her to his home, cut her off from her husband in a way similar to Coyote's shutting Badger in a hole. Thus, in her recollection of the Coyote/Badger legend, the woman has, once again, consciously or subconsciously recognized the connection between myth and reality.

Silko reinforces this connection by using first person narration. The young woman's confusion about her own identity asserts the legendary quality of personal experience. The Pueblo woman tells her story just as her grandfather had told her Yellow Woman stories. She even refers to her sojourn with Silva as a story. The first time she has a chance to escape but decides to remain with Silva in the mountains, she assures herself that her family can get along without her and that, to explain her absence, they will tell a story about the day she disappeared when she went for a walk along the river.

Several times during her story, she identifies with the Yellow Woman stories. Even though she has told Silva that they could not possibly be reliving the myths and that she could not be Yellow Woman because she has her own name, the young woman still wonders if even Yellow Woman had known who she was—if she knew that she would become part of the stories. Maybe she'd had another name that her husband and relatives called her so that only the ka'tsina from the north and the storytellers would know her as Yellow Woman. (p. 35)
The story's final line emphasizes this fusion even more explicitly. Here, the narrator concludes that she is "sorry that old Grandpa [is not] alive to hear my story because it was the Yellow Woman stories he liked to tell best" (p. 45). This line is purposefully ambiguous, for it could refer to her grandfather's seeing parallels between her story and the Yellow Woman legend, or the line could again indicate the young woman's conscious or subconscious identification with Yellow Woman.

The reenactment of the Yellow Woman abduction story by modern characters is the theme of another of Silko's works, a poem called "Storytelling." The poem begins with an allusion to the legend in which Yellow Woman, after walking to the river for water, is abducted by a kachina. It continues with stories of local Laguna women who ran away with their lovers. On the one hand, one of the women explains:

Seems like
it's always happening to me.
Outside the dance hall door
late Friday night
in the summertime,
and those brown-eyed men from Cubero
smiling.
They usually ask me
"Have you seen the way the stars shine
up there in the hills?"
And I usually say "No. Will you show me?"

This woman's situation bridges reality and myth as she seems to be both escaping her home life by running away with "that Navajo from Alamo . . . the tall good-looking one" and paralleling herself with Yellow Woman by explaining that "He told me he'd kill me if I didn't go with him." Here again, in "Storytelling" as well as in "Yellow Woman," Silko affirms that one cannot escape participating in the myths of the past, for once one knows the old stories, one cannot help but see that people keep living out the same situations over and over again. There is comfort in this knowledge of continuity. Silko explains that remembering and retelling the old myths "is a creating of a kind of identity for you so that whatever kind of situation you find yourself in, you know where you are and you know who you are."7

The continuity of mythic situation and behavior by modern people is one theme of Silko's novel *Ceremony*. Her protagonist, a World War II vet, Tayo, participates in a personal ceremony to help rid his land of drought and his people of the evil growing in their midst. Throughout her main narrative, Silko intersperses poetic

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versions of myths which comment on and parallel the main action. For example, she tells the story of how one time the people neglected the mother corn altar and chose to study Ck'o'yo magic instead. Angered at the people, Nau'ts'ity'i dried up the land and took the rainclouds away. In order to pacify Nau'ts'ity'i, the people must get Buzzard to purify the land. Fly and Hummingbird must take tobacco, pollen, beads, and prayer sticks to Buzzard so that he may perform the ceremony. Only after gathering all the ingredients and using them in the right way is the land purified. This verse myth parallels Tayo's struggle to overcome his guilt about Rocky's and Josiah's deaths, his guilt over participating in the war, his feeling of responsibility for the dry land, and his anger about the evil which he sees in another war vet, Emo, and in the white man's influence on the Indians.  

Like Buzzard, Tayo must participate in a healing ceremony, the ingredients of which are told to him by old Betonie, a medicine man who lives, appropriately, in

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8 In "Ceremony as Ritual," American Indian Quarterly, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Feb. 1979), Carol Mitchell notes, "The curing of the world sickness which involves drought on the earth parallels the curing of Tayo's despair. Basically, we see three causes of the sickness of the Pueblo world. First, a misunderstanding between Corn Woman and Reed woman led to drought. Second, the omission of proper rituals by the War Twins, Ma'see'wi and Ou'yu'ye'we angers Nau'ts'ity'i, the corn mother,
the foothills north of the Gallup Ceremonial Grounds. He must overcome physical nausea and overlook antagonism from family and friends who don't believe in all the old ceremonies and traditions. However, as Tayo finds himself drawn closer to the land and tradition and removed farther from the evil, he is saved.

Tayo is helped by recalling mythic stories that guide him in the proper way to respond to life and the living. For example, early in the novel, Tayo remembers an incident from his youth in which he had been taught in the white school that flies were dangerously dirty creatures. Consequently, he killed many of them and proudly showed his pile of dead flies to his uncle Josiah. His uncle then tells a story that causes Tayo to reconsider the importance of all creatures, even insects. Josiah recounts the old story of how, long ago,

and leads to drought. Third, the witches, who are evil and continually cause sickness and death, have a contest to show off their magical powers, and the white race is created" (p. 29). Although the first two stories are certainly based on traditional myths, the third, notes Mitchell, may also have some basis in Laguna mythology. She explains that although Nau'ts'ity'i is the mother of Indians, I'tcts'ity'i is the mother of the white race and is also half witch. This links the creation of white people to witchery. In turn, this helps link Tayo's struggle against white influence to traditional myth in yet another way.
"Way back in time immemorial, the mother of the people got angry at them for the way they were behaving. For all she cared, they could go to hell--starve to death. The animals disappeared, and no rain came for a long time. It was the green-bottle fly who went to her, asking for forgiveness for the people." (p. 106)

Josiah's warning, "The next time, just remember the story," is wisdom that Tayo carries with him throughout his struggle (p. 107).

Tayo works hard to find his family's lost Mexican cattle, and the woman, stars, and mountain that will lead him to them. He fights to keep from giving in to alcohol and the white fantasy world to which other Indian vets have succumbed. Although his journey is dangerous, Tayo understands that difficulty is part of the ceremony. His growth is reflected in his realization at the end of his ceremony that "it has never been easy" (p. 266). Tayo's admission parallels and completes the mythic narrative of purification, for his statement is echoed in the advice Nau'ts'ity'i offers Fly and Hummingbird: "Stay out of trouble from now on. It isn't very easy to fix up things again" (p. 268).

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In Ceremony, Silko's characters often use the term "time immemorial" when they are referring to the old myths, legends, and ceremonies. Grandma, Josiah, and the others who are most in touch with the old ways and practices refer to "time immemorial" as their culture's collective past, which is still the basis for their present beliefs and customs.
In effect, then, myth offers a kind of relief for modern Indians, for it shows them that their situations and behavior are repeated generation after generation and are the subjects of many traditional stories as Silko shows in "Yellow Woman," "Storytelling," and Ceremony. Just as importantly, however, myth teaches people how to behave. The ceremonies that worked for people in the past still work for those who take the time and effort to continue them today. At the beginning of his ceremony, Tayo takes the first step in his healing process, for he acknowledges: "If a person wanted to get to the moon, there was a way; it all depended on whether you knew the directions—exactly which way to go and what to do to get there; it depended on whether you knew the story of how others before you had gone" (p. 19). Tayo's realization brings us back to the web of storytelling, with the interconnected events of past and present and the relationship between reality and myth. The filaments of the mythic web extend ever outward into modern life.
Chapter 3: The Place of Ceremony and Ritual in Storytelling

Hena-ti-tzi
He-ya-shetzi
So you-tano-mi-ha-ai

Of the clouds
and rain clouds
and growth of corn
I sing.

"The Go-wa-peu-zi Song" (Storyteller)

The third component of the storytelling web is religion. Those of us from Anglo culture may be somewhat able to appreciate the importance of the individual storyteller to Silko's writing because we all tell stories and can identify with Silko's explanation of the satisfaction that comes from having a story of one's own. We can also understand the role of myth in her work because myth is a part of the story tradition in every culture's storytelling. However, the place of religion in Silko's work is more elusive. Perhaps this is merely because our Judaic-Christian deities and religious stories are so different from Pueblo deities and religious stories. More probably, however, our problem with understanding Pueblo religion comes from our ever-changing Christian principles. These are frequently modified and shaped by modern technologies and world politics and increasingly differentiate themselves from Pueblo religious practices. Frank Waters writes
in *Book of the Hopi* about how the Hopi view life:

[Their] existence always has been patterned upon the universal plan of world creation and maintenance, and their progress on the evolutionary Road of Life depends upon the unbroken observance of its laws. In turn, the purpose of their religious ceremonialism is to help maintain the harmony of the universe. It is a mytho-religious system of year long ceremonies, rituals, dances, songs, recitations, and prayers as complex, abstract, and esoteric as any in the world. It has been the despair of professional anthropologists, ethnologists, and sociologists.1

Pueblo religion in general, Laguna in particular, is a wholistic lifestyle. It advocates that each person be one with the land and other living creatures. Respect for nature is its implicit principle. It combines the material and physical worlds, and the practice of ceremonies and rituals supports this lifestyle. In fact, myths, some of which were discussed in chapter 2, cannot be separated from religion, for many of them show the importance of harmony and peace between nature and man and indicate that only through this harmony and peace can come individual self-fulfillment.

Silko's fiction and poetry illustrate the place of religion in her culture. Her work shows that ceremony and ritual are still effective despite acculturation. Some of her fiction simply outlines certain ritualistic

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practices and shows the peace that an individual can derive from following these rituals. She also contrasts white and Indian religions and shows the conflicts and ironies that arise when modern Indians are torn between two cultures. Finally, she illustrates the importance to modern Indians in maintaining their religion. Although she indicates that because of white influence and acculturation, Indian religious practices may have to be modified, she believes that only in retaining links to the past, the land, and nature, can the individual find salvation from a world touched by evil.

A recurrent theme in Silko's work is how important the earth and all living creatures are to her people. Indian deities are personified inanimate objects or nonhuman creatures such as Taiowa, the sun; I'tcts'ity'i (sometimes Nau'ts'ity'i), the corn mother; and Spider Woman. All deities, especially the mother earth and her gifts, are to be respected. In return for this respect, the deities continue to give the people gifts and guidance. In "Prayer to the Pacific," Silko reverently articulates her awe of the ocean, which is as "Big as the myth of origin." She explains the offering of gifts as a token of her respect:

I return to you turquoise the red coral you sent us
sister spirit of Earth
Four round stones in my pocket I carry back the ocean
to suck and to taste.

She speaks of the ocean as if it were a friend, and their exchange of gifts--the speaker's precious stones for "rain clouds [that] drift from the west"--is out of respect for one another and out of hope for the continuation of a peaceful relationship.

Just as Indians respect the deities, they also respect the animals that give their lives so the people may be nourished. The killing of animals involves ceremony, and the dead creature is treated reverently for its ultimate gift of life. In Storyteller, Silko explains that late every winter the Laguna people have a Deer Dance to honor the deer who have given their lives during the fall hunting season so that the people may have meat. She explains that "only when this has been properly done will the spirits be able to return to the mountain and be reborn into more deer who will, remembering the reverence and appreciation of the people, once more come home with the hunters."

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3 "Prayer to the Pacific," p. 179.
5 Storyteller, "In the fall," p. 191.
The winter Deer Dance is not the only ritual connected to the killing of the deer. There is also special treatment for each deer immediately after it has been killed. In *Ceremony*, Silko explains the practice of putting silver and turquoise rings around the deer's antlers and a bowl of cornmeal near its nose, so that anyone passing by may touch the nose with corn meal and feed the deer's spirit. Out of respect for the deer, its eyes are covered while it is being gutted. Silko the storyteller sings her thanks to the deer, her respect for the ritual treatment it receives, and her hope for its annual return to her people in "Deer Dance/For Your Return." In the poem she reminds the deer:

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I took
the best red blanket for you. . . .
I tie feathers on antlers
whisper close to you
we have missed you
I have longed for you.
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As the storyteller weaves her story of ritual, her song of respect for the deer turns into a prayer, and she chants:

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Year by year
after the first snowfall
I will walk these hills and
pray you will come again
I will go with a heart full, for you
to wait your return.
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7 "Deer Dance/For your Return," p. 190.
In effect, then, Silko's story of the deer ritual also becomes a ceremonial prayer, for although the poem lists the necessary ingredients of respect to be paid to the animal, it also tells both of the longing Silko has for the animal's gift of its life each year and of her promise to continue her reverence for the deer.

Silko's fiction continually emphasizes the individual sense of contentment which comes from following a lifestyle attuned to nature. However, her writing also shows the intrusion of Christianity on Indian religion and the conflicts that arise because of this intrusion.

White influence on Indians on this continent may be traced back as early as the Jamestown settlement in 1607. During this time, we find the first record of an Indian Christian convert, Pocahontas, who was baptized, married John Rolfe, founded "a new dynasty fit for the ideals of the New World, white man and red woman, the brotherhood of man."\(^8\) Charles Larson, in *American Indian Fiction*, explains that our "Indian myth," our belief that we helped the Indians by forcing our religion and culture onto them, is an attempt to relieve our sense of

\(^{8}\)Larson, p. 18.
guilt. For whatever truths or fictions are known or hypothesized about our first Indian heroine, Pocahontas, we still speculate about why an Indian princess would convert to Christianity, marry an Englishman, and move to England. We wonder what promises Christianity offered her, what rosy picture of civilization and Christianity might have been painted for her. Ultimately, however, the more fictional than realistic visions we have of Pocahontas indicate our own need to save the Indian "savages." Of course, we never bothered to find out whether the Indians desired our version of salvation,

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9 In "The Mother of Us All: Pocahontas Reconsidered," Kenyon Review 24, 1962, p. 413, quoted in Larson, p. 20, Philip Young writes ironically about our American perceptions of the Pocahontas story, of her helping the pilgrims, and of her conversion to Christianity. He explains that our perceptions seem to be that:

"Our own ways, race, religion must be better--so much better that even an Indian . . . albeit an unusually fine one (witness her recognition of our superiority), perceived our rectitude. But it nicely eases the guilt we have felt since the start of its popularity over the way we had already begun, by 1608, to treat the Indians. Pocahontas is a female Squanto, a 'good' Indian, and by taking her to our national bosom we experience a partial absolution. In the lowering of her head we feel a benediction. We are so wonderful she loved us anyway."
and we never cared whether they completely understood our religious practices.

The pilgrimages of missionaries into Indian territory are history, and the record of that Christian influence on the Indians is part of Silko's fiction. Silko shows what happens when Indians attempt to incorporate Christianity into their own religious practices. Ultimately, the combination of the two religions creates some interesting ironies.

In "The Man to Send Rainclouds," Silko focuses on some young Indians who are preparing an old Indian for burial. When two of these Indians, Ken and Leon, find Teofilo dead at the sheep camp, they tie a gray feather in his hair, paint colored stripes on his forehead and cheekbones, and throw corn meal and pollen into the wind while praying that the old man send them rainclouds. The young men take Teofilo home and dress him in new clothes so that he will be ready for his journey to a new life. Throughout the story, Christianity is juxtaposed to Indian religion. The village's priest, Father Paul, questions Ken and Leon about attending mass soon after they have begun their ceremonial preparation of Teofilo's body and spirit; church bells ring the Angelus just as the family is dressing Teofilo's body in the new clothes for his burial. One of the sharpest ironies,
however, comes from one of the young Indian women, Louise, "her hands stil dusty from the corn meal that she had sprinkled around the old man," and her desire that Leon ask the priest to sprinkle holy water for Teofilo, "so he won't be thirsty" in the next world. The irony becomes richer as Leon goes into town for Father Paul. The priest, looking out of a well furnished home and a "glossy missionary magazine," is torn between his duties as a priest and his feeling that the Indians want the holy water to ensure a good harvest.

Father Paul becomes a more pitiable character than the Indians who have just lost a member of their family. The priest's religion, with words for last rites and masses and colored pictures of lepers and pagans, offers a cold contrast to the religion of the young Indians. Their religion connects the old man's death with the hope of a new life (for which he needs new clothes for his journey) and rain clouds for his survivors. The priest sprinkles holy water over the grave and leaves in confusion, unsure if he has done the proper thing. Leon, however, feels good about combining the Indian ceremony with the sprinkling of Christian holy water

because he believes that "now the old man could send them big thunderclouds for sure."\textsuperscript{12}

In "The Man to Send Rainclouds," Silko illustrates how Indians who believe in the old ways are able to see connections in all things, not only between life and death, but between the sprinkling of holy water and the coming of rain clouds. In this story, only the white man has trouble seeing the connections. The priest's world is distanced from the earthly Pueblo life that surrounds him. Outside his home are twin bells imported from Spain and a door carved with symbols of the Lamb. Inside, his home is furnished with brass lamps, heavy curtains, and modern furniture. We remember back to Teofilo, who lived outside at the sheep camp with live lambs not carved ones. The cottonwood, under which Teofilo died, sharply contrasts with Father Paul's green chair into which he sinks when he hears of Teofilo's death.

The more harmful effects of white influence and Christian religion upon Indians appears in \textit{Ceremony}. The beginning of the novel focuses on the war vet, Tayo, who, not accidentally, lives in a world of "white smoke." This smoke seems eerily symbolic of the white

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{12}}"The Man to Send Rainclouds," p. 8.
doctors and the white medicine that are unable to cure his confused mind and tired spirit (p. 14). Tayo's world of "white smoke" is also representative of the education and religion imposed on him in white schools. These schools separated Tayo from the old Laguna beliefs and the old stories and myths that connected the people to nature, ceremony, and ritual. In our first picture of Tayo, we see what is left of him after white people have tried to take away his Indianness, his sense of identity with his people. They have tried to give him new values and new beliefs that contrasted with his culture's values and beliefs. Hence, like the "white smoke, [that] had no consciousness of itself," Tayo no longer knows who he really is (p. 14).

A major premise of Silko's novel is that modern Indians must get back to the old ceremonies and rituals that connect them to the earth and keep them in touch with nature and her gifts. Unfortunately, however, white influence, often perceived as evil by the Indians and manifested in such things as schools, religion, and wars, has made it impossible for life to be exactly as it once had been in "time immemorial." These "evil" influences are continually growing in the Indian world today, and Silko suggests that Indians must estrange themselves from the evil that is manifested in their
own disrespect for their land, people, and traditions. Indians need to remember the stories and repeat the ceremonies, but must also know about the changes that have to be incorporated in the ceremonies because of the ever growing components of the evil and witchery.

The forces of evil and the destructiveness of evil create a spider web pattern in *Ceremony*. One of the mythic poems that Silko includes in the novel explains that "Long time ago/ in the beginning . . ./The world was already complete. . . ./There was everything/ including witchery" (p. 139). But witchery needed something to set it in motion; hence, it created white people, who became the instruments used by the witchery at the center of the web. White people "never looked beyond the lie, to see that theirs was a nation built on stolen land . . . white thievery and injustice," and, consequently, they allowed themselves to become pawns of the witchery (p. 199). White witchery's tools are many and varied: alcohol, big city life, cars, money, and the glory of war, all used to seduce others outside their race to help them in the evil. The web continues to grow until the circles of its weaving embrace modern Indians like Emo, Leroy, and Harley, who admire the white race for its possessions. Emo, for example, after fighting in World War II, becomes part of the evil, for he thrives on his war experiences and draws his strength
from alcohol and from describing the number of times he has killed.

Other parts of the web, though less conspicuous than the wars and the blatant injustices of stolen land and broken promises, also contribute to witchery's withering effects on Indians. In Tayo's case, white doctors had told him that he should "think only of himself, and not about the others, that he would never get well as long as he used words like 'we' and 'us'" (p. 132). Forcing an Indian to think only of himself is to separate him from the Indian perception that an individual's cultural identity helps him to establish his personal identity. This Indian principle opposes Christian doctrine that

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tried to crush the clan name, encouraging each person to stand alone, because Jesus Christ would save only the individual soul; Jesus Christ was not like the [earth] mother who loved and cared for them as her children, her family. (p. 70)
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White people encouraged Rocky, Tayo's cousin, to believe that to get ahead in the world and to get a football scholarship, he should forsake such things as the deer ritual and the "superstitions" of the people in his village. White schools taught Tayo and Rocky that flies carry germs, not that the green-bottle fly once saved the people, as was told in old Laguna myth.
Another web, a curative web, however, is juxtaposed to the web of evil in the novel. This is the web of stories and the timelessness of their messages. Spider Woman begins *Ceremony* by explaining the importance of stories as a weapon against witchery:

You don't have anything
if you don't have the stories.

Their evil is mighty
but it can't stand up to our stories.
So they try to destroy the stories
let the stories be confused or forgotten. (p. 2)

In the novel, Spider Woman, through Silko, spins a ceremony connected by stories that overlap and intertwine. The immediate purpose of this ceremony is to save Tayo. The overall purpose of this ceremony, however, is to save the people by providing them with a means of saving themselves from the evil. Just like the Spider Woman of myth, the Spider Woman of *Ceremony* guides her people by showing them the necessity of holding on to what is still important in the old ceremonies and rituals, and, finally, by indicating that although the old ways are still important, people must be willing to accept some changes in the ceremonies in order to keep them strong against a growing force of evil.

Spider Woman herself insists that story is part of ceremony, for she explains, "in the belly of this story *[Ceremony]*/the rituals and the ceremony/are still growing" (p. 2). Consequently, as Tayo remembers the stories
and ceremonies, he is caught up by their saving properties. Only through his remembering and his participation in the ceremonies is Spider Woman's own ceremony complete.

Carol Mitchell explains that \textit{Ceremony} exists on three simultaneous planes: human, socio/cultural, and mythic/ritual.\textsuperscript{13} Tayo's story is the human plane; it is the story of one man's struggle to overcome despair. The socio/cultural plane encompasses the struggles of the Pueblo people, who are confused by acculturation and desperately need to see the truths that Tayo sees by the end of the novel. This plane includes such stories as that of Helen Jean, a Ute Indian, who covers herself in Anglo dress and makeup and attempts, unsuccessfully, to compete with white women in city life. This plane also includes the story of a little boy (Tayo), who lives an impoverished existence in shacks, bars, and filth outside Gallup. The final mythic/ritual plane contains the traditional stories interspersed throughout the novel and the ceremonies of Ku'oosh, Betonie, Tayo, Ts'eh, and others. This plane also equates characters in the novel with mythic figures or gives certain characters mythic proportions.

\textsuperscript{13}Mitchell, p. 27.
In Tayo's struggle for survival and his concern for his people, we see a parallel to the mythic ceremony and journeys of Fly, Hummingbird, and Buzzard to save the Indian people from drought and hunger. Ts'eh also has mythic connections; Carol Mitchell sees Tayo's and Ts'eh's sojourn together as a reenactment of the traditional Yellow Woman myth.\(^{14}\) Mitchell also notes mythic connections in "the ritualistic repetition of the [golden] eyes motif" which occurs in Ts'eh, "Josiah's Mexican woman, Betonie and his grandmother . . . and with Tayo himself. At the end of the novel Ku'oosh and the other medicine men seem to recognize Ts'eh" when Tayo speaks of her eyes.\(^{15}\) The three planes in the novel continually overlap, for Tayo's individual ceremony of survival and renewal has mythic connections. Further, Tayo's struggle is a struggle necessary to all Indians if they are to survive and overcome witchery and the effects of white acculturation.

Tayo's personal struggle is complex. In the beginning of the novel, he is separated from love, the people, and the land. He cannot recall the old stories


\(^{15}\) Mitchell, p. 34.
or participate in the ceremonies because he has become consumed by the white man's world. The reader is told that the Laguna medicine man, Ku'oosh, has performed the Scalp ceremony for the returning war vets in hope that they may be helped back into Laguna culture. Unfortunately, when Tayo first returns to Laguna, he is too far removed from his heritage to be helped by such a ceremony. At the beginning of the novel, not only is Tayo in a world of "white smoke," but he also views himself in terms of lifeless objects: his tongue is "dry and dead," he feels as immobile as a "fence post," and he thinks that he is becoming like "brittle red clay, slipping away with the wind, a little more each day" (pp. 15, 26, 27).

In spite of such dead feelings, Tayo holds the key to his salvation within himself. Even at the beginning of the novel he remembers the timelessness of time and the old myths, and he recalls that "distances and days existed in themselves, then; they all had a story. They were not barriers" (p. 19). Unfortunately, Tayo's remembering this only causes him misery, for he equates a lack of time and distance barriers with his participation in killing the Japanese, a participation which makes him responsible for Josiah's and Rocky's deaths. He also feels that his cursing the ceaseless rain that tormented him on the Pacific Island has caused the drought.
in Laguna. Although Tayo is on the right track in seeing the bond among all human beings, and although he is correct in knowing that he should respect nature, Tayo cannot see beyond the killing and the cursing to understand that acknowledging a lack of time and distance barriers is part of his way to salvation. If Tayo properly understood the old stories and traditional beliefs, he would not feel guilty either for the deaths of Rocky and Josiah or for the drought. Unlike Leon in "The Man to Send Rainclouds," Tayo does not perceive the connection to life that is in death. Paula Gunn Allen suggests that Tayo does not "know that it is not in the deaths of two individuals that the prosperity or the suffering rests. Perhaps no one has told him that the dead come back as rain so that death is a blessing for the People, not its destruction."  

Old Betonie, the Navajo medicine man, is the first person to start putting things in perspective for Tayo. Betonie lives in a world of collected rubbish: "shrunken skin pouches," "painted gourd rattles," and "layers of old calendars," the collected debris of decades of ceremonies (p. 126). Tayo initially doubts the power of a man who lives among junk and "the leftover things the whites
didn't want," but what Betonie says to him makes sense (p. 133). Betonie explains to Tayo that it is not surprising that he saw Josiah's face in the face of a dead Japanese; he acknowledges Tayo's feeling of timelessness and the breakdown of distance barriers: "you saw the witchery ranging wide as the world" (p. 131). Betonie gives Tayo a place to start in the ceremony by encouraging him to remember the old stories and ceremonies and by explaining that his sickness is part of a larger world sickness caused by the witchery. But the most important thing that Betonie does is inform Tayo that even though the ceremonies are still important, constant change must be a part of the ceremonies:

"Long ago when the people were given these ceremonies, the changing began . . . if only in the different voices from generation to generation, singing the chants. . . . Things which don't shift and grow are dead things. . . . Witchery works to scare people, to make them fear growth. [But growth] has always been necessary, and more than ever now, it is." (pp. 132-133)

In getting Tayo to be aware of growth and change, in forcing him to take part in a ceremony in the mountain, Betonie helps Tayo begin to make the right kind of connections. Tayo remembers the old stories and myths: of Bear people taking a young boy, of Coyote kidnapping a child, and of Kaup'a'ata, the Gambler, stealing the stormclouds. Tayo remembers the connections that these
stories have to witchery and how, through ceremony, the people saved the young boy from the Bear people, the child from Coyote, and how Sun Man retrieved the storm-clouds from the Gambler. Tayo remembers the story of how Buzzard purified the land so that the crops and the rain could return to the people. In all these stories, Tayo begins to see the connections to his own life and the necessity for his fighting back against the witchery.

As Tayo opens himself to the importance of his ceremony, he leaves Betonie, who has told him to remember the pattern of stars he has drawn in the sand. These stars, a mountain, Josiah's lost Mexican cattle, and a woman are the ingredients Tayo needs to complete his ceremony.

Every night after leaving Betonie, Tayo looks for the stars. Finally, in September, he sees them in the north and knows that it is time for him to go to the mountain and search for the cattle. Tayo's constellation heralds the autumnal equinox in September. Carol Mitchell explains that the purification ceremonies of traditional peoples begin in May, and spring is when Tayo's own ceremony begins; the purification ceremonies end "at the equinoxes or winter solstices, and clearly Tayo sees the equinox as the end of the old year" and the finish of his personal ceremony.17

17 Mitchell, p. 18.
The second ingredient of Tayo's ceremony is the mountain. Mountains are important throughout Ceremony. They seem to attract people of vision or supernatural powers; perhaps this is because the higher the Indians go into the mountains, the further they can get from the white man's influence and the closer they can get to undefiled nature. The mountain draws Night Swan to Cubero. Descheeny and his Mexican woman lived in the Chuska mountains. And, finally, Tayo meets Ts'eh, whose last name, Montaño, means mountain, on the mountain. On the mountain, Tayo experiences peace and a type of rebirth. As he and Ts'eh observe a she-elk painted on a cliff, her belly symbolically swollen with new life, Tayo observes the autumn sky as "transitional" and feels the rebirth of his own life resulting from his ceremony (p. 241).

The third ingredient, the spotted cattle, have several functions in Tayo's ceremony. First, in sinking all of his energy into finding them, he has forgotten the painful events of the past years. Additionally, by stealing the cattle back from the white men who have stolen them and fenced them in, he believes that "the spotted cattle wouldn't be . . . scattered through his dreams" anymore, and he would not be "driven by his hesitation to admit they had been stolen, [and] that
the land—all of it—had been stolen from them" by
the white man (pp. 200-01).

The final ingredient of Tayo's ceremony, the woman
Ts'eh, teaches him how to love. Ts'eh is connected,
like other powerful women in the novel—Night Swan and
Betonie's grandmother—to life forces. These women
cover themselves in blue. From Betonie's grandmother's
blue lace shawl, to Night Swan's blue satin kimono and
slippers, to Ts'eh's blue silk shawl, the women surround
themselves with the color of the water and sky. Even
Ts'eh's name is connected to nature, for Ts'eh has its
roots in the Indian Tse, water, and Tse-pi'na, woman
veiled in clouds. 18 Tayo's union with Ts'eh takes on
the symbolism of a ritualistic union between man and
nature, and the words that describe their union sug-
gest such meaning:

He eased himself deep within her and
felt the warm close around him like
river sand, softly giving way under
foot, then closing firmly around the
ankle in warm water. . . . When [the
climax] came, it was the edge of a steep
riverbank crumbling under the downpour
until it all broke loose and collapsed
into itself. (p. 118)

Only after loving Ts'eh is Tayo able to feel the renewal
of morning, that "the instant of the dawn was an event
which gathered all things together" (p. 190). Only at

18Allen, p. 8.
this time is Tayo able to chant the ceremonial prayer of the Dawn people to sunrise, the prayer which Spider Woman uses to open and close her own ceremonial story of Ceremony. The power of love has finally opened Tayo to the power of a new life and rejuvenation.

After completing his ceremony, Tayo is put to a test by the witchery. Early in the novel, Tayo had almost been caught up in the witchery, for he had been enclosed in a "thick white skin" which had silenced "the sensations of the living, the love as well as the grief" (p. 240). Before Tayo's healing ceremony began, he had sat in bars with Harley, Leroy, and Emo. He had listened to their war stories, had gotten drunk, and had observed the nights progressing "according to that ritual: from cursing the barren dry land, to talking about San Diego and the cities where the white women were still waiting for them," to the killing in which they had participated (p. 62). The nights were like witchery ceremonies in which the participants basked in evil. Constant exposure to the evil had almost consumed Tayo. During one of these barroom witchery ceremonies, Tayo had given in to his anger at Emo and shoved a broken beer bottle into his stomach. If Tayo had killed Emo, he would have been lost to the powers of witchery by giving in to an impulse to destroy life.
At the end of the novel, Tayo again observes a witchery ceremony. Its participants are Harley, Leroy, Emo, and Pinkie. Participants in religious ceremonies purify themselves through fasting and vomiting, but in this mockery of a religious ceremony, the participants have polluted their minds and bodies by getting drunk. In an eerie contradiction of the traditional beating of ceremonial drums, "Pinkie beats on the car, . . . but the drumming is metallic and unnatural."¹⁹ Finally, in a diabolical parallel to the Pueblo sacrifice of cornmeal, pollen, and prayer sticks, the participants in this ceremony offer Harley as a human sacrifice to the witchery. By torturing Harley, Emo hopes to bring Tayo out of hiding so that he may destroy him too. By resisting his impulses to save Harley and to strike out at Emo in anger, Tayo saves himself. Only the clear thinking that has come from completing his ceremony has helped him. He knows that had he saved Harley and killed Emo,

he would have been another victim, a drunk Indian war veteran settling an old feud. . . . The white people would shake their heads, more proud than sad that it took a white man to survive in their world and that these Indians

¹⁹Mitchell, p. 32.
couldn't seem to make it. At home the people would blame liquor, the army, and the war, but the blame on the whites would never match the vehemence the people would keep in their own bellies, reserving the greatest bitterness and blame for one of themselves that they could not save. (pp. 265-66)

As Tayo resists the temptations of the witchery ceremony, his final step in the healing is completed. His first thoughts are of T'sez and nature, as he decides to go back to the mountain to plant delicate medicinal plant seeds for her, believing that there in the mountain the plants would grow "like the story, strong and translucent as the stars" (p. 266). Tayo's salvation is also paralleled in the rejuvenation of the land at dawn, for on his way home, he observes "the clouds with round heavy bellies" that are gathering in the sky. Tayo's healing ceremony has incorporated the changes and the growth of which Betonie had spoken. Tayo's own rituals and ceremonial ingredients have been personal, but they have mythic connections and have served a traditional purpose by purifying Tayo and reconnecting him to his people and his heritage.

The overlapping filaments in the web of many mythic and modern stories in Ceremony proves the timelessness of time and the lack of distance barriers of which Tayo has always been aware. Tayo's clearest perception of this comes as he rides into the mountain to find the
lost cattle:

The ride into the mountain had branched into all directions of time. He knew then why the old timers could only speak of yesterday and tomorrow in terms of the present moment: the only certainty; and this present sense of being was qualified with bare hints of yesterday or tomorrow, by saying, "I go up to the mountain tomorrow." The Ck'o'yo Kaup'a'ta somewhere is stacking his gambling sticks and waiting for a visitor; Rocky and I are walking across the ridge in the moonlight; Josiah and Robert are waiting for us. This night is a single night; and there has never been any other. (p. 201)

Tayo's story with its mythic connections and its ceremony are part of a larger story with its own mythic connections and ceremony for survival instigated by the mythic Spider Woman and contained within the pages of Silko's novel. In essence, Tayo's ceremony for survival is only a part of a larger ceremony for survival which Silko offers to her people. In Ceremony, she has created a vision of the possibility of salvation, of the possibility for holding on to Pueblo religious ceremonies and culture in the face of white acculturation.
Conclusion: Stories as Link Between the Individual and Society

"I guess I must be getting old . . . because these goings on around Laguna don't get me excited anymore. . . . It seems like I already heard these stories before . . . only thing is, the names sound different."

--Ceremony

Leslie Silko's work shows that stories have at least three primary functions. First, Silko shows that storytelling helps tellers establish their own personal identity. Through the stories they tell, people re-create their own pasts or the pasts of their families or society. Further, regardless of whether tellers relate traditional or modern stories, their stories will be their own special versions of what occurred in the past, and no one else will be able to relate these incidents in quite the same way. Consequently, stories have an important duality: they are personal and individual, and, at the same time, they are cultural and traditional.

Second, Silko shows that many modern stories share a mythic tradition, for many modern events have parallels in myths and legends of the past. The mythic connection between modern and traditional stories provides comfort to people who can see that events in their own lives are not much different from events of the past. This same mythic connection also helps people to see that
their own problems and their responses to those problems are not unusual and that people in times past have had similar troubles and frustrations and have reacted in similar ways. In fact, some myths even serve as models for behavior by showing people responses that have worked for others.

Finally, Silko's work shows that stories have important religious connections. For example, stories may be a part of ceremony and ritual by offering praise and thanks to nature and to the land. Mythic stories may recall how an individual's or a tribe's salvation was dependent upon maintaining respect for and giving tribute to the deities. Stories with religious connections may even show how the individual who lives in harmony with nature is repaid by having strength to fight back against the evil of witchery, which is manifested in everything from the magic of evil kachinas to the dangers of white acculturation.

The various functions of stories, however, often overlap because all stories (and even the process of storytelling) help to make individual Indians more aware of who and what they are culturally. For example, Silko's novel, Ceremony, is an account of how Tayo uses the old myths and legends to bring him back to his people and their traditional beliefs and practices. In
turn, Tayo's own story provides an example for all modern Indians who feel separated from their heritage. Whether individual tellers' stories place them among the centuries of tellers who have told stories, or whether a modern Yellow Woman finds relief in knowing that at least one other woman has been torn between a romantic encounter and her family, or whether an individual finds peace and guidance through traditional ceremonies and stories of others performing those ceremonies, all stories provide individuals with a cultural context. Silko offers her own feelings about this context by explaining that:

A lot of people make a mistake when they hear me talk and they hear me laugh about the storytelling and I think they confuse, they don't understand. . . . But it's very important, and it's not just gossip and those aren't just stories. . . . The whole basis for what keeps the people . . . together is everything that they know . . . through all time about each other and about themselves.¹

Through Silko's explanation, we cannot help but see the spider web effect that storytelling generates. With the individual at the center of the web and Indian culture at the exterior of the web, each story is one strand or filament that extends outward and links the two parts. Further, the image of Spider Woman and her

web appropriately represents Silko and her work and storytelling as a whole. Spider Woman has her basis in tradition. She is a creatress and a source of help and guidance to her people. Stories, like Spider Woman herself, are part of Indian tradition, and they offer modern Indians a part in the creative process by allowing individuals to tell or retell their versions of people and events that touch their lives. Stories also provide help and guidance to people willing to listen to the advice they contain. As Silko writes in "The Storyteller's Escape," "'With these stories of ours/ we can escape almost anything/ with these stories we will survive.'"²

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VITA

Kristy S. Long
505 West Third Street
Bethlehem, PA 18015

EDUCATION

MA, 1983, Lehigh University, Bethlehem, PA
   English Literature

BA, 1977, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL
   English Language and Literature
   Dean's List
   Graduated Cum Laude

UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

Lehigh University
   Career Planning and Placement Services
   Graduate Assistant, 1982-Present

   English Department
   Teaching Assistant, 1977-1982

HONORARY/PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

Sigma Tau Delta
Omicron Delta Kappa
National Council of Teachers of English 1977-1982

PERSONAL

Birth: January 8, 1955
   Somerset, PA

Parents: James and Marilyn Long